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SERVICE SOLUTIONS SUCCESS

CITY OF EL PASO, TEXAS



BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE MEETING

The El Paso City Council established the Blue Ribbon committee to evaluate and provide recommendations to the City council on forming a regional parks system in El Paso including but not be limited to:

- 1) Viability of a regional park system;*
- 2) Structure and multiple funding options for a local model, including a dedicated City tax for parks and open space; and*
- 3) Obtaining State approval in forming a regional park authority if necessary.*

Date: Wednesday, May 19, 2010

Time: 3:00 p.m.

Place: City Hall Building, 2 Civic Center Plaza, 8th floor conference room

AGENDA

1. Call to order.
2. Discussion and action on the approval of the minutes of the Blue Ribbon Committee of May 5, 2010.
3. Discussion and action on response to questions listed on Representative O'Rourke's memorandum (attached) on establishing recommendation for forming a regional park system between the City of El Paso and El Paso County and the possibility of including other local government entities.
4. Discussion and action on final recommendations and report to City Council.
5. Adjourn

PUBLIC NOTICE: Sign language interpreters will be provided for this hearing upon request. Requests must be made to the City Manager's Office a minimum of 24 hours prior to the date and time of this hearing. Copies of this agenda will be provided in Braille, large print or audiotape upon request. Requests must be made to the City Manager's Office a minimum of 48 hours prior to the date and time of this hearing.

Mayor
John F. Cook

City Council

District 1
Ann Morgan Lilly

District 2
Susie Byrd

District 3
Emma Acosta

District 4
Carl L. Robinson

District 5
Rachel Quintana

District 6
Eddie Holguin Jr.

District 7
Steve Ortega

District 8
Beto O'Rourke

City Manager
Joyce A. Wilson

Thoughts on a Regional Parks District

I have been asked by the members of the Blue Ribbon Committee to lay out a vision for the proposed Parks District as I understand it at this time.

First, the reason that we're even talking about this is that we understand that parks and recreational assets (trails, open space, ball fields, recreation centers, skate parks, etc.) are critical to the success of a community. They are the quality of life infrastructure that attracts and retains the most important investment to our region: human capital. A world-class parks system is a necessary component of a world-class city.

We don't have a world-class parks system today. We have a decent city parks system that is getting better; we have a few good recreational assets developed and managed by the County; and we have hundreds of acres of fields and courts overseen by the various independent school districts in the region. In addition, we have many other important recreational resources controlled by yet other political subdivisions: the State of Texas' Franklin Mountain State Park; the International Boundary and Water Commission's Rio Grande levees; the Public Service Board's open space assets; and the Water Improvement District's network of canals.

In addition there is a pressing concern with the cost of government and corresponding pressure to consolidate, share services and cut the cost of government where possible. The enabling language for our Committee reads in part: "Whereas, local taxing entities have made a commitment to evaluate opportunities for shared services, resources and responsibilities for more efficient use of tax revenue and to reduce duplication of governmental service in the area..."

Essentially, we want a higher level of parks and recreational resources at a net savings to the taxpayer over what he would pay to get that result under the status quo.

My vision is the following:

A parks district that allows for all El Paso city and county citizens to access all recreational assets throughout the county (including ISD assets); one that encourages master planning of recreational assets, regardless of which political subdivision controls them, to maximize capital investments; one that provides for economies of scale and efficiencies in the provision of services to offer greater value to El Paso taxpayers; one that ensures the development of greater assets and higher quality services than we would otherwise be able to provide as individual political jurisdictions; an entity -- judged by the capital projects it develops, the level of maintenance and service it provides and the value it offers to the taxpayer -- that is greater than the sum of its individual parts.

Essentially:

As taxpayers, we want to treat all recreational assets -- whether controlled by the City, the County, the ISDs or other political subdivisions -- as part of one system. We think that

this offers greater value to the taxpayer who pays to support all of these individual systems as part of his taxes and will lead to a better, more consistent level of service.

Potential Benefits:

- Citizen access to all assets (e.g. school basketball courts in the summer)
- Master planning (build school and city recreational assets in conjunction)
- Economies of scale (purchasing, labor and systems management)
- Transparency (taxpayer pays into one entity to manage all assets – budget is published and adopted separate from all other subdivisions)
- Dedicated, consistent funding (no longer competing with Fire, Police or a step-child in the County budget as a non-mandated service)
- Insulation from politicized decisions (e.g. fee schedules set like PSB sets water rates vs. how Council and Court set fees now)

Potential Drawbacks:

- Size of system overwhelming
- Savings/economies not realized
- Pushback from political subdivisions
- Resources siphoned from City assets to County assets

In order to endorse some form of this system, we need to know the following:

- What is the budget of this proposed system?
- What tax rate and fee schedule would this system require?
- What corresponding budget savings, as they move out their parks functions, would each contributing entity enjoy?
- What is the value of the efficiencies/economies of scale that we could create?
- What kind of capital projects could we undertake that are not now possible?
- What are potential additional costs that we would shoulder?
- What are opportunities for additional revenues? (e.g. Ascarate)
- How would we protect the integrity of the largest component of this proposed system (the City's assets)?
- What is the ideal form for this system to take? (e.g. Metro Park District)

When El Pasoans were considering a Storm Water Utility in 2007, they were able to reflect on the need and possible benefits of the Utility, and they were also able to see a proposed budget, fee and list of capital projects. It was with that data that we were able to make an informed decision. Likewise, I am hopeful that the questions above can be answered and the concept fully vetted by our Committee in time to make an informed recommendation to the City Council and, if it is a positive one, to the other political jurisdictions and ultimately to the taxpayer.

Beto O'Rourke
May 5, 2010